

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T SAIGON 4356

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SUBJECT: SENATE PRESIDENT TRAN VAN LAM ON PROSPECTS FOR CAN CABINET

1. TRAN VAN LAM HAD RECENTLY ALLEGEDLY PRESENTED TO PRESIDENT THIEU A PLAN CALLING FOR THIEU TO RESIGN ALONG WITH VICE PRESIDENT HUONG. LAM, AS PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, WOULD ASSUME POWER UNDER THE CONSTITUTION AND CALL ON AIR MARSHAL KY TO ASSUME THE POWERS OF THE PRIME MINISTER AS CHAIRMAN OF A BROADLY BASED COUNCIL TO RUN THE GOVERNMENT. THIEU TURNED IT DOWN AS UNWORKABLE. WITH DEMISSION OF CABINET AND APPOINTMENT OF LOWER HOUSE SPEAKER NGUYEN BA CAN AS PRIME MINISTER DESIGNATE, I ASKED MINISTER JOSIAH BENNETT TO CALL ON LAM LAST EVENING (APRIL 5) FOR HIS REACTION TO THESE EVENTS AND PRESIDENT THIEU'S ADDRESS TO THE NATION FRIDAY EVENING.

2. LAM TOLD BENNETT THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH HAD RAISED MORALE FIFTY PERCENT. HIS OWN MORALE WAS MUCH BETTER. HE HAD NOT KNOWN ABOUT CAN'S APPOINTMENT UNTIL CAN CALLED HIM ABOUT 6:00 P.M. THE DAY BEFORE. CAN, HE SAID, IS NOT A "TALKATIVE" MAN, BUT HE IS A GOOD MAN AND HONEST. LAM THINKS HE CAN BRING IN SOME OPPOSITION, PARTLY BECAUSE HE HAS A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH BUU AND THROUGH BUU WITH THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE. BUT THE ONLY NAME HE SEEMED TO FEEL RATHER POSITIVE ABOUT IS PROFESSOR HUY, LEADER OF THE PROGRESSIVE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT, WHO HE THOUGHT MIGHT BE OFFERED A POST AND MIGHT SERVE.

3. CAN WILL BE TRYING TO FIND HIS CABINET TOMORROW (SUNDAY). MONDAY HE WILL FORMALLY RESIGN FROM THE HOUSE SPEAKERSHIP.

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4. MEN WHO DEFINITELY SHOULD REMAIN IN THE CABINET ACCORDING TO LAM ARE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HAO AND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PHAN QUANG DAN, BOTH OF WHOM ARE POPULAR AND DEDICATED TO THEIR JOBS. HE WAS LESS CERTAIN ABOUT FOREIGN MINISTER BAC, WHOM HE CALLED A "GOOD TECHNICIAN". HE DID NOT KNOW ABOUT FORMER PRIME MINISTER KHIEM, BUT THOUGHT HE MIGHT STAY ON AS A MILITARY ADVISER. HE SEEMED TO THINK GENERAL VIEN SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO RESIGN FROM JGS AND FELT GENERAL NGO QUANG TRUONG MIGHT MAKE A GOOD SUCCESSOR.

5. BENNETT ASKED ABOUT THE FOUR GENERALS WHO WERE BACK OF LAM AND KY. HE SAID HE HAS HAD NO FURTHER WORD. LAM IS SUSPICIOUS OF KY, HE SAYS, BECAUSE HE THINKS KY WILL NOT STAY WITH THE CONSTITUTION. HE SAID FIRMLY THAT IF THERE IS A COUP HE WILL QUIT.

6. BUI DIEM, TRAN VAN DO, AND FORMER SENATOR DANG VAN SUNG HE THINKS WILL PROBABLY NOT JOIN THE NEW GOVERNMENT. THEY HAVE A DIFFERENT VIEW ON POLICY TOWARD NEGOTIATIONS THAN THE PRESIDENT. THIS REVOLVES AROUND THREE QUESTIONS:

A. THE PRESIDENT HAS SAID HE WILL NOT FORMALLY CEDE ANY TERRITORY TO THE COMMUNISTS. HE WILL FIGHT TO GET IT BACK IF HE CAN. THIS SEEMS TO RULE OUT ONE AVENUE OF COMPROMISE (ALTHOUGH TO SAY ELSE WOULD LOSE SUPPORT OF THE ARMY.)

B. WITH THIEU STILL PRESIDENT, WILL THE COMMUNISTS NEGOTIATE? FEAR THAT THEY WILL NOT IS WHY DR. DO WILL NOT JOIN, HE SAYS. YET TO GET RID OF THE PRESIDENT WOULD DO VIOLENCE TO THE CONSTITUTION.

C. THE PRESIDENT SEEMS TO BE CLEAR THAT HE WILL NOT NEGOTIATE WHILE THE COMMUNISTS FIGHT. BUT WILL THE COMMUNISTS GRANT A CEASE-FIRE? THE QUESTION OF A CEASE-FIRE IS VERY IMPORTANT BECAUSE THIS IS WHAT IS NOW SOUGHT BY SOME RELIGIOUS GROUPS, MAKING IT AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL ISSUE, WHETHER REALISTIC OR NOT.

7. ABOUT THE U.S. LAM TOLD BENNETT HE WAS DISCOURAGED TO HEAR A REPORT THAT SENATOR MCGHEE HAS CHANGED HIS MIND ON AID BECAUSE OF THE CURRENT LINE AT HOME THAT THE ARVN WON'T FIGHT. BENNETT TOLD HIM IT SHOULD BE THE PRIORITY CONCERN OF THE GOVERNMENT TO SEE THAT THE PRESS IS ENABLED TO REPORT ON AND PHOTOGRAPH GOOD
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FIGHTS, OF WHICH THERE HAVE BEEN SOME RECENTLY IN THE MR-3 AREA.

8. COMMENT: THIS ALL SEEMS TO POINT, I THINK, TO A BASIC DIFFERENCE AMONG NATIONALISTS BETWEEN HARD-LINERS LED BY THIEU WHO, ALTHOUGH WILLING TO NEGOTIATE IMMEDIATELY ON BASIS OF PARIS AGREEMENT, ARE VERY TOUGH AND REALISTIC ABOUT THE COMMUNISTS AND SOFT-LINERS WHO, WHILE OPPOSING ANYTHING LIKE THE COMMUNIST COALITION GOVERNMENT FORMULA, STILL WISTFULLY HOPE THAT

SOMETHING ELSE MIGHT BE NEGOTIATED AND WANT TO GIVE IT A TRY
BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.
MARTIN

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